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ABSTRACT

A principal's level of involvement in collective bargaining can range from being a member of the negotiating team to merely being the recipient of the signed negotiated contract. This paper considers four possible roles for principals: (1) as a member of the negotiating team, (2) as part of a steering committee working with the negotiating team, (3) as a member of a council that is informed of but does not participate in collective bargaining matters, (4) as an advisor with only occasional input into the process. Being a member of a negotiating team gives principals the greatest opportunity to influence school district policy. Yet principals who are negotiators may experience conflicts of interest, since on some issues, their interests are those of management and, on others, those of teachers. Also, principals may suffer from the bitter feelings teachers sometimes direct at members of negotiating teams. As members of steering committees working with negotiating teams, principals stay well informed of negotiations activities but are less inclined to develop conflicts with teachers. The most common roles for principals in collective bargaining are the last two--either receivers of periodic information about negotiations processes or advisors who are surveyed only before bargaining begins. Either condition sometimes prompts principals to consider forming their own collective bargaining units. (Author/JM)

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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The principal is often the first line administrator of teacher contracts reached through collective bargaining. However s/he is often the forgotten element in the preparation for negotiations and in the ongoing collective bargaining process. Principals are directly involved as members of district bargaining teams in a distinct minority of cases.[1] Moreover, it seems that top management opposes their inclusion at this level.[2] The impact of collective bargaining on a principal's rights, responsibilities and discretionary powers has clearly been felt by many principals. The sense that their authority has been eroded through teacher negotiations has been one of the major motivating factors in the movement to form separate bargaining units.[3] While there may be wide differences in the extent that negotiated teacher contracts, have affected principals in many areas of the United States and Canada, there is no doubt that the con-

tracts have precipitated -- if not caused -- significant changes in what a principal does and how he or she does it.[4]

What effects do increased involvement of the principal in collective bargaining produce? What are alternative ways of a principal's involvement and their corresponding effects? These are the questions addressed in this paper. Discussion of effects and alternatives will be based on recent experience in a major metropolitan area and reports in the literature.

There are many possible effects of principals' direct or increased involvement in collective bargaining. The levels of involvement can vary from being a member or even leader of the negotiating team to being the recipient of the negotiated contract -- contents previously unknown or unseen -- only after signatures have been penned to the document. Few principals are chief negotiators -- or would want to be, and few who know much about their school or district would be totally unaware of the contents of the final agreement at that late date, but many fall in between and differ significantly in the roles they play as the final document takes shape. Four roles will be considered: First, that of a principal who is a member of the negotiating team. Second, that of a principal who is part of a steering committee working directly with the negoti-

ating team. Third, that of a principal who belongs to the district administrative council or meets regularly with other principals and the central office staff on this and other administrative matters, and fourth that of a principal who has input into the process only prior to the start of negotiations, occasionally during and at the end in the implementation of the contract.

The first role, that of membership on the negotiating team, ordinarily gives principals the greatest opportunity to affect school district policy in the area of negotiated contracts. While difficult to distinguish cause from effect, one of the most important effects of principals' participation as members of the negotiating team is a difference in the decision-making structure of the district. Principals find that the direct access to Board members and central administrators in planning, strategy and evaluation sessions tends to make their views carry more weight than when they are polled indirectly or represented through the superintendent. There is more likelihood that all principals will be informed of developments of ongoing negotiations. The formal and informal communications channels set up by this mode adds to principals' usual board access routes. In cases where central administrative staff or Board members may be tempted to bargain away principals' prerogatives or misrepresent the

experience or views of principals, the direct access to the negotiating team is an effective antidote.

There are possible conflicts which may arise as a result of principals being part of negotiating teams. First, there may be a conflict of interest. Does the principal represent management or labor? Often the principal is the advocate for labor, arguing for teachers in terms of lower class size, more materials, more time for in-service, and more support personnel. He or she works closely with teachers daily, supporting them and collaborating in many projects. Loyalties may more naturally rest with them. Add to this factor, the community of interest many principals share with teachers in the results of contract negotiations. In many districts, principals and other administrators receive the same fringe benefits as those negotiated by the teachers. A better settlement for the teachers means a better contract for administrators. Myron Lieberman, in opposing some concepts of management team operation, points out the likelihood that administrators might side with the union if the management team includes too many middle managers.[5] Whether principals side with management may depend on how seriously their viewpoints are considered by the Board negotiating team.

A conflict of the principal with teachers can also arise. The principal could be identified with the Board and top

management in the aggravations of negotiations. Lack of trust, personal animosity, and an unwillingness to work together could occur. These feelings are heightened when strikes occur. Bitter feelings are common after strikes, particularly long ones, even if principals are not on negotiating teams. The chance of bitterness developing towards a negotiating team member is a major reason why many principals do not favor being members of the negotiating team. As a matter of fact, this same reason -- the chance of getting caught up in the bitterness of the bargaining table -- is often used as an argument against superintendents, directors or even Board members being part of negotiating teams.

As in other direct confrontations, the strength, knowledge and credibility of the individual has its effect in negotiations. If a knowledgeable and respected principal is part of the team, the Board's position will be strengthened and the tone of the whole process will be elevated. Such an effect depends however on the respect the principal has earned with the Board and teachers and the general acceptance of the principal's presence and participation by Board members. Many Boards and superintendents are unwilling to accept principals in this role.

A great deal of time is spent in negotiations, much of it time devoted to stereotypic and dramatic posturing and

following of what has become a bargaining ritual -- proposal counter-proposal, extreme beginnings and compromise settlements. Principals aren't the only ones to decry this apparent waste of time, as late nights devoted to bargaining can make the next day's tasks much more burdensome. Small wonder that many if not most principals would prefer to leave the bargaining to others.

When principals are an active part of the bargaining unit, other principals are almost always better informed of negotiations, more meeting time of principals is usually devoted to discussing negotiations topics and principals feel that their interests are better protected. The degree of improved information flow and this heightened security will of course depend on the cohesion among the principals and the amount of influence their bargaining team representative(s) exert on the Board's position.

Expanding the numbers and types of people on the bargaining team increases the possibility of information leaks. Where confidentiality is important in negotiations an expanded team with principal participation becomes a disadvantage for the Board.

Finally having principals on Board negotiating teams may have the effect of increasing principals' skills, knowledge

and desire to engage in their own negotiations with the Board, whether it be in formal, legal, bargaining sessions or informal, Meet and Confer arrangements.

Another role of principals in negotiations may be that of members of a steering committee dealing with the substance and tactics of negotiations.[6] Not a very common practice, this method of involvement does give principals access to Board deliberations, enables other principals to be informed by a colleague of ongoing developments (but not all subtleties) of negotiations and can result in a spin off of more frequent administrative team-type operation in the district, i.e. administrators sharing common knowledge, deliberating and planning as a team. In this role principals are less apt to develop conflicts with teachers resulting from across-the-table bargaining tensions. Also, by not sitting at the negotiating table, principals' credibility becomes less of a factor in the deliberations. There may still be a question as to whether principals would side more with management or labor in this situation. It is possible that, not working directly with the negotiating team, principals might lean more toward development of their own identity as third parties in the bargaining process, those who should advocate the particular rights of middle management.

By far the most common forms of principal involvement are

those in which principals get periodic updates from central administration on negotiations progress or are surveyed for their input before bargaining begins in earnest. Typically superintendents ask principals to comment on the teachers' initial bargaining proposal and request that they make suggestions in areas that have particular implications for building operation, such as preparation time for teachers, teacher supervisory duties, meeting times and disciplinary procedures. These forms of participation have little effect on the typical policy making structure or process in school districts. No change is afforded in access to the School Board or opportunities to give opinions. In some districts there may be an effective way of getting views of administrators on important collective bargaining topics in the form of "educational impact" statements before bargaining begins.[7]

Effects of direct participation are not present in this mode. What is present is a condition which has prompted many principals and principal organizations to consider collective bargaining for themselves. While admitting that a smooth functioning administrative team would be a preferable mode of operation, many principals feel that such teams do not exist or that there is insufficient desire or incentive on the part of Boards to foster them. The current stance of major principal organizations is that of cautious approval of the administrative team concept while retaining the option of finding

alternatives of the team concept does not work.[3]

The effects of various types of principal participation in collective bargaining can be summarized under the headings of decision-making changes, unity among principals, conflict, negotiation dynamics and role change. Decision making changes result when principals develop better access to the Board, extend their participation in Board deliberations beyond collective bargaining topics, and enhance their status vis-a-vis the Board and the superintendent. Principals' unity among themselves and their consequent effectiveness as a group increases as they become recognized by the Board as a group with valuable views (paradoxically this coming together may also occur if principals are completely ignored or their decision-making powers lessened or constricted as a result of collective bargaining). Their greater participation also increases their own skills in bargaining which could be used in their own discussions with the Board.

Conflicts may arise with teachers when or if bargaining becomes bitter. The closer principals are to the bargaining table the more likely they are to be involved in such conflicts. Conflicts of interests may arise when principals who work daily with teachers have to side with management against labor.

The dynamics of negotiations are affected by the skills,

personalities, strengths and weaknesses of all principals. Principals' first hand knowledge of school matters and basic credibility can have a significant effect on these dynamics.

Finally, the role of the principal may come more clearly into focus as a result of more active participation in negotiations. Some principals have commented that they have been forced to be reactors to administrative policies and procedures as a result of decisions reached through collective bargaining. When participating more fully in the process, they have the opportunity to reverse the order and become what many claim only a principal can become, namely, the single most important person to exert an influence on a school and consequently on the children who learn there.

NOTES

1. "Here's What Your Fellow Boards Are Doing About Teacher Bargaining, "The American School Board Journal," June 1977, pp. 28-29.

2. Ibid.

3. Norman Barea, "Separate Bargaining Units -- A Must for Today's Principal," NASSP Bulletin, May 1977, pp.43-51.

   "The Brewing -- and, Perhaps, Still Preventable -- Revolt of the School Principals," The American School Board Journal, January 1976, pp. 25-27. Also, Bruce S. Cooper, "Collective Bargaining Comes to School Middle Management," Phi Delta Kappan, October 1976, pp. 202-204

4. A differing view is presented by Paul Berg, "The Impact of Collective Bargaining Upon the Principal," Administrator"s Notebook, XXI, No. 9, 1973. The argument is made in this case study that collective bargaining agreements do not have as much impact as first thought on building administration. However surveys of principal's attitudes clearly indicate their conviction that negotiations have adversely affected their prerogatives as managers.

5. Myron Lieberman, "The Administrative Team? It's an Invitation to Trouble," The American School Board Journal, June 1977, pp. 24, 26-27.

6. John H. Leddy, "Public Participation in Negotiations," NASSP Bulletin, September 1975, pp. 3-7

7. "Salmon Outlines How Boards of Education Can Manage Administrative Bargaining," The School Adminstrator, April 1977, p. 15. However, since the collective bargaining process is one of constant give and take, such statements may not be adequate to represent principals' views and interests when compromise agreements are ready to be finalized.

8. "Management Team Pros and Cons Aired by Association Heads," The School Administrator, May 1978, p. 14.